

**Testimony in support of funding to provide Free School Meals to All Students**  
**Appropriations Committee Subcommittee on Elementary and Secondary Education**  
**Public Hearing on the Governor's Proposed HB06659 FY 24-25 Budget for Elementary and Secondary Education**  
**February 23, 2023**

Co-Chairs Senator McCrory and Representative Felipe, and members of the Appropriations Committee Subcommittee on Elementary and Secondary Education, my name is Karen Edwards. I live in Stamford. I am a member of Indivisible Stamford. I am a faculty member in Public Health and Pediatrics, a parent and a retired pediatrician/ public health professional. **I am testifying in strong support of funding expansion of school meal programs to Provide Free School Meals to All Students** through H.B. No. 6659 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2025, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR.

In my family, my generation has never experienced being hungry, but as recently as my parents' generation, my family depended on government and community assistance to stave off hunger and we are forever grateful for that.

The short and long-term academic and health benefits of Free School Meals for All Students is well supported by the evidence which has been summarized recently by the *Brookings Institute* (<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2021/02/11/schoolwide-free-meal-programs-fuel-better-classroom-outcomes-for-students/>) and by the center right American Action Forum policy group (<https://www.americanactionforum.org/research/health-and-education-impacts-of-the-school-breakfast-program-and-national-school-lunch-program/>.) Aside from the immediate priceless benefits to children who would no longer be hungry and would do better in school, free school meals benefit schools by decreasing the costs of administering the free and reduced-cost meal program and benefit the state by increasing the academic readiness of tomorrow's Connecticut workforce and by increasing purchase of food for school meals from CT businesses and farms. Honestly, though, from my viewpoint, it would be benefit enough just to keep the 90,000+ food-insecure CT children from experiencing hunger.

Most who read this testimony have probably never experienced being hungry. They don't know how badly it makes children feel and how it decreases concentration and the ability to learn and keep up with academic requirements. Let's make sure that Connecticut children do not experience the pain of hunger or hunger's other negative short-term and long-term consequences. I can't imagine how a parent must feel when they cannot keep their children from being hungry, but I CAN imagine the relief they feel at knowing their children will be fed in school.

Preventing children from experiencing acute hunger now and increasing academic achievement and life success for children as they grow into adulthood is an important role for state government.

**I strongly urge you to provide funding to Provide Free School Meals to All Students.**

Thank you,

Karen Edwards MD MPH, Stamford CT